

Congressman Elijah E. Cummings

June 19, 2002

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*A message from
Congressman Elijah E. Cummings*



It is both a privilege and honor to represent you in the United States Congress. While serving you, I will continue outreach efforts to further inform you of legislative action in Congress. I welcome your advice. Government "by the people" is the cornerstone of my legislative philosophy.

Elijah E. Cummings
Member of Congress
A Sensible Prescription Drug

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Plan for Seniors

During the week of June 10, Congressman Cummings participated in two key events that brought attention to the importance of Congress passing a sensible prescription drug plan for seniors.

On June 11, Congressman Cummings visited the Total Health Care clinic in Baltimore to learn more about the role of federally-qualified health centers in urban neighborhoods.

During the tour, Congressman Cummings applauded how the center provides health to patients regardless of whether or not they carry health insurance. In addition, he was pleased to learn how the center goes out of its way to help senior patients meet the high cost of prescription medicine.

For example, the center offers a discount drug program to help the uninsured with drug costs. It also has a Pharmacy Fund to help cover these costs.

"When talking to seniors, many have shared how they have to go from doctor to doctor to get free samples of medicines they need. Oftentimes, they have to choose between buying groceries and the medications prescribed by their doctor," Congressman Cummings said.

He added, "But because of community health centers, these patients have access to the medicines they need to survive."

Later in the week, on June 13, Congressman Cummings joined his House Democratic colleagues in introducing the Prescription Benefit and Discount Act which would make prescription drugs available under Medicare and guarantee lower prices for these drugs.

The House Democratic proposal adds a new Part D in Medicare that provides voluntary

prescription drug coverage for all Medicare beneficiaries beginning in 2005.

Under this legislation, a beneficiary would pay a \$25 a month premium, a small annual deductible of \$100, and would never spend more than \$2,000 a year on prescription drugs. In addition, Medicare would pay 80 percent of the co-insurance payment for the medication, while the beneficiary would pay only 20 percent.

"Passage of the Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit and Discount Act would make it easier for seniors to get medicines they need to stay healthy," Congressman Cummings said.

Supporting Community Health Clinics

Congressman Cummings' visit to Total Health Care also emphasized the positive role of community health centers in eliminating racial health disparities.

"In addition to Total Health Care, Baltimore is fortunate to have six other federally qualified health centers: Baltimore Medical Center, Chase Brexton Health Services, Health Care for the Homeless, Park West Medical Center, People's Community Health Center, and South Baltimore Family Health Center," Congressman Cummings noted.

He added, "All of these centers are working to eliminate the unacceptable and immoral conditions in our health care system that has made being Black - or being poor - mortality factors."

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Community Health Centers (From Page 1)

Congressman Cummings called for the immediate passage of the following legislation currently being considered in the U.S. House of Representatives concerning federally qualified health centers. These initiatives include:

- The REACH Initiative that would support the development of 1,200 new or expanded health centers over the next five years, allowing six million additional patients to be served.
- The Health Care Safety Net Improvement Act (H.R. 3450), introduced by House Health Subcommittee Chairman Michael Bilirakis (R-FL) and Ranking Member Sherrod Brown (D-OH), would reauthorize the federal Health Centers program and the National Health Service Corps.
- The Medicare Safety Net Access Act (H.R. 4000), sponsored by Representatives Jerry Weller (R-IL) and John Lewis (D-GA), would expand the services available to Medicare patients in federally qualified community health centers by improving Medicare+Choice.

Assessing the Proposed Homeland Security Department

Following President Bush's announcement calling for a Cabinet-level Homeland Security Department, Congressman Cummings applauded the efforts to implement a comprehensive national strategy against terrorism.

Currently, the office of Homeland Security is under the White House and lacks its own budget and operational authority. If the office were elevated to a Cabinet-level Department, it would be accountable to congressional authorization and appropriations committees. Congressional Democrats have been pushing for a similar plan for months.

"The Department that implements homeland security must be accountable to Congress and the American people, and not just the President," Congressman Cummings said.

However, Congressman Cummings and his colleagues also noted that creating the department would require extensive review so that the department would have comprehensive authority to avert future attacks and protect American citizens on U.S. soil.

"One of our major concerns here on Capitol Hill is the limited authority that the new department would have over intelligence gathering, since the CIA and FBI would still remain independent agencies," Congressman Cummings said.

On Monday, June 17, Congressman Cummings, as the Ranking Member of the House Government Reform Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources, heard testimony on how the proposed new department would affect law enforcement efforts that are not directly related to terrorism, such as drug policy enforcement.

In the next few weeks, Congressman Cummings also expects to

examine the Homeland Security Department proposal with the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, on which he serves. This Committee would examine the proposal to move the Coast Guard and Transportation Security Agency under the jurisdiction of the new department.

Morgan State Receives \$99,000 Federal Grant through Congressman Cummings' Efforts

On June 14, Congressman Cummings announced that the U.S. Department of Commerce has awarded Morgan State University a \$99,000 federal grant for its University Technical Assistance Center.

As a catalyst of increasing economic development in the Baltimore area, Congressman Cummings worked with U.S. Senators Paul S. Sarbanes and Barbara A. Mikulski (D-MD) and U.S. Congressman Benjamin L. Cardin to secure this grant.

The grant will help to fund the operation of the University Center, which utilizes higher education resources to provide the community with outreach services in the areas of technology. The center forms partnerships with local businesses and government agencies to implement its services.

"This grant will help promote prosperity in the Baltimore area after a difficult economic period," Congressman Cummings said. "In recent months, the closing of many manufacturing plants has caused significant unemployment. But this grant will provide technical assistance and expertise to those who want to start a new business after experiencing a setback."

The University Center program is a federal/academic partnership administered by the Commerce Department's Economic Development Administration. At Morgan State University, one of the key initiatives of the program has been to provide assistance in manufacturing operations. In this area, the Center has provided guidance for production planning, facilities operation, organizing plant layouts and evaluating a manufacturing facility.

Congressman Cummings Hosts The 3rd Annual Congressional Kidney Disease Health Fair

Wednesday, June 26, 2002, 11:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
Rayburn House Office Building Foyer, Washington, D.C.

Find out why kidney disease is referred to as the "silent killer"; pick up educational pamphlets about kidney disease; get free screening for blood pressure and glucose levels; find out the latest on kidney disease research; and question the experts on kidney disease.

Representatives Shelley Berkley (D-NV), Jim McDermott (D-WA), Connie Morella (R-MD), and Mark Kirk (R-IL) also join Congressman Cummings in hosting the health fair. The event will be sponsored by the American Society of Nephrology.
